

# 4

## Mahā Suññata Sutta

The Greater Discourse on Emptiness<sup>1</sup> or the Discourse on the Great Emptiness | **M 122**

Theme: The joy of spiritual solitude

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005; 2023

### 1 Sutta themes

#### 1.1 COMPARATIVE STUDY

The main idea of this Sutta is that of the ideal conditions for spiritual development, internal (proper attitude) and external (proper teacher). The Sutta is implicitly but beautifully structured on **the noble eightfold path**.

According to Rod Bucknell's Pali & Chinese Āgama concordance (2004), the Mahā Suññata Sutta is found in the Taishō Tripiṭaka as **MĀ 191 = T1.738a-740c**,<sup>2</sup> and the Tibetan Kanjur<sup>3</sup> as **P957 (P38.279)** and as **Kj:De 291**.<sup>4</sup> The Tibetan version is entitled **Mahā,śūnyatā Mahā,sūtra** (The Great Discourse on the Great Emptiness), and Peter Skilling says that since the sutra itself is rather short, here the title must mean "Discourse on the Great Emptiness." (1997:369)<sup>5</sup>

This Sutta together with its full commentary has been published by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli as *The Greater Discourse on Voidness* (1965).<sup>6</sup> Bhikkhu Pesala has given a paraphrase of the Sutta's selected passages.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1.2 DANGER OF SEEING DHARMA AS SOCIALIZING

The Sutta opens with the Buddha in Kapila, vatthu where he notices that a large company of monks are staying close together and sees **the danger of their socializing and fraternizing** [§§1-2.2]. Ānanda informs the Buddha that the monks who have gathered were making robes as it is robe season (which would be the month after the rains retreat, that is, around October-November) [§2.3]. The Buddha rebukes Ānanda, exhorting him that a monk who delights in company "does not shine" [§3], that is, would not progress spiritually, not even attain "**freedom of mind that is temporary and pleasant**" [§4.2].

The Commentary explains that this "freedom" refers to freedom from defilements through attaining full concentration with the mind fixing itself on the meditation object (*appit'appita, samaye kilesehi vimuttam*) (MA 4:158). This evidently refers to "letting-go through suppression" (*vikkhambhana, pahāna*), that is, the temporary overcoming of the defilements through the attainment of the first dhyana (MA 4:158).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tr at the request of David Sugiman (Indonesia), National University of Singapore Buddhist Soc, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Here, see Choong 1999:79-84.

<sup>3</sup> Beijing ed, Ōtani reprint, Tokyo, 1956. *Kanjur* means "Buddha Word" (in Tib tr).

<sup>4</sup> Kj:De 291 = Kj:De 71.253b-261b, the **mḍo chen pos tong pa nyid chen po zhes bya ba**, tr Jinamitra, Prajñā-varman and Ye śes sde prob early 9th cent. For Romanized & other eds, see **Skilling** 1994:xiii f, 182-263; for his critical tr, see 1997:365-400.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on prefix *mahā* before suttas, see Analayo 2005 ad M 122 Intro n & also **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 9.2.

<sup>6</sup> Wheel no 87. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> [Selected Discourses from the Majjhimanikaya \(aimwell.org\)](http://www.aimwell.org).

<sup>8</sup> **Paṭisambhidā, magga** speaks of 5 kinds of extinction (nirodha) of mental defilements and distraction: (1) extinction by suppression (*vikkhambhana nirodha*); (2) extinction by substitution of opposites (*tad-aṅga nirodha*); (3) extinction by cutting off of destruction (*samuccheda nirodha*), ie at the moment of attaining the Path; (4) extinction by tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi nirodha*), ie at the moment of the fruition on the supramundane path (ie, the attaining of streamwinning, etc, short of arhathood); (5) extinction by escape or liberation (*nissaraṇa nirodha*), that is, the attainment of nirvana (Pm 1:27, 220 f; Vism 410; cf Vism 693). These 5 are also called abandonment

The Buddha points out the danger of lustful desire in physical things [§5]. He speaks of his own “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā vihāra*) [§6] and encourages the monks to abide thus [§7].

### 1.3 THE MADDING CROWD

**1.3.1** The Majjhima Commentary generally stresses on the issues of crowding and of space: a crowded life is spiritually stifling; the spacious life supports a focused mind that brings freedom. The tone of the Commentary here reflects that of a passage from the prophetic **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26), where it describes India (Jambu,dīpa) of the future thus:

And in the time when those people have a lifespan of 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa [Jambul<sup>9</sup> Continent] will be powerful and prosperous, and villages, towns and cities will be but a cock’s flight from one to the next.

And in the time when those people have a lifespan of 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa would be like the Avīci hell, thick with people like the jungle is thick with reeds and rushes.

At that time, the Benares of today will be a royal city called Ketu,mati, powerful and prosperous, crowded with people and plenty. In Jambu,dīpa there will be 84,000 cities headed by Ketu,mati as the royal capital. (D 26,23/3:75)

The Mahā Suññata Sutta opens with the Buddha noticing the crowded dormitories at Kāḷa Khemaka’s dwelling, how the beddings and resting places are placed so close together that they touch one another.

**1.3.2** The Commentary gives this long dramatic account:

Before this, it seems, the Blessed One had never before seen ten or twelve monks dwelling in one place. Then this occurred to him,

“This group-living [social life] (*gaṇa,vāsa*) is extremely common in the rounds of existence. As water collects into rivers, so group-living is common in hell, in the animal world, in the ghost realm, and in the asura existence; and in the human world, the heavenly world, and the Brahmā world, too.

For hell is 10,000 yojanas<sup>10</sup> across and is crowded with beings, like powdered lead packed in a tube. There is no counting or reckoning the beings in the place of torture of by the fivefold binding.<sup>11</sup> There is no counting or reckoning the beings in the place of paring with adzes, etc.<sup>12</sup> Such is the way they are cooked in groups.

As for the animal world—just as there is no counting or reckoning the termites in a single termite nest; and there is no counting or reckoning of ants in an ant-hill—even so, is the group-living in the animal world, too.

And there are ghost cities a quarter or half a yojana across crowded with ghosts. Such is group-living in the ghost realm, too.

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(*pahāna*), freedom (*vimutti*), solitude (*viveka*), detachment or dispassion (*virāga*) or letting go or relinquishing (*vossagga*).

<sup>9</sup> The *jambul* is the black plum of India: see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29/5:59-65) @ SD 16.15 (3).

<sup>10</sup> A *yojana* is the yoke of an Indian plough (J 6:38, 42). As distance, it is as far as can be covered by a yoke of oxen, ie, about 11.25 km or 7 mi (DhA 1:108, 2:13).

<sup>11</sup> See **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129,10/3:166), SD 2.22 & **Deva,dūta S** (M 130,10/3:182 f), SD 2.23.

<sup>12</sup> See **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129,12/3:166), SD 2.22 & **Deva,dūta S** (M 130,12/3:183), SD 2.23.

The 10,000-yojana-wide sphere of the asura demons is like the hole in the ear just that a needle might go through. Such is group-living in the asura world, too.

As regards the human world, there are 5,700,000 in the families living in Sāvatti; inside and outside Rājagaha, there are 1,800,000 people. Such is group-living in certain places in the world, too.

Beginning with the earth deities, there is group-living in the heavens and the Brahmā world, too. Each deva has two and a half crore of dancers, even up to nine crores. And there are ten thousand Brahmās living in one place.”

Then he thought, “For 4 incalculables and a hundred thousand aeons, the 10 perfections<sup>13</sup> have been fulfilled by me for the purpose of undoing group-living. As soon as those monks who formed themselves into groups and find delight in groups, they will act in an unbecoming manner, forming groups and delighting in them.”

Then, the feeling of concern for the Dharma arose in him, and he thought again, “If it were possible to announce a training rule that two monks should not live in one place I would do so, but that is not possible. Come now, let me expound the discourse called ‘The Practice of Great Emptiness’ (*mahā suññatā paṭipatti nāma suttantaṃ*), which for training young men of family desirous of training, will be like a promulgated training rule.

It will be like a full-length looking-glass placed at the city gate. Then, just as kshatriyas [nobles] and so on, seeing their blemishes in the looking-glass, would get rid of them and become unblemished; even so, indeed, even for 5000 years after I have attained final nirvana, young men of families delighting in solitude through paying attention to this discourse, avoiding groups [society], and so will make an end of the suffering of the rounds of existence.”

And the number of young men of family who, by heeding this discourse and avoiding groups [society] would, as it were fulfilling the Blessed One’s wish, have made an end of suffering and attained final nirvana is beyond reckoning.

For, in the Vālika,piṭṭhi monastery [in Sri Lanka], the Abhidhamma specialist named Abhaya Thera, after reciting this discourse together with a number of monks on the occasion of entering the rains residence, said: “The Fully Self-awakened One enjoins us to act thus, and what are we doing?” And all of them, by avoiding the group and delighting in solitude, attained arhathood within that same rains.

This discourse is called the breaker-up of groups (*gaṇa,bhedanaṃ*). (MA 4:155-157)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “The ten perfections” (*dasa pāramī*) are a late canonical list of virtuous qualities said to lead to Buddhahood. These 10 qualities, occurring frequently in **Buddha.vamsa** (B 6 f, 11, 38, 62, 48), **Cariyā,piṭaka** (Cp 83, 102 f, 588), **Jātakas** (J 1:73, 6:546), **Apadāna** (Ap 5 f, 17, 23, 26, 28 f, 32, 37, 40, 43, 45, 48, 212, 309, 318, 325, 369, 411, 443, 551), & DhA 1:84, are: (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) effort (*virīya*), (6) patience (*khanti*), (7) truthfulness (*sacca*), (8) determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), (9) loving-kindness (*mettā*), and (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*). On older usage of *pāramī* as “completeness, perfection, highest state, see Sn 1018, 1020; Pug 70; VvA 2; PvA 139. Cf *pāramī-p, patta* (M 3:28 f; Nc 20, 435; Miln 21, 22). The Skt sources list 6 perfections (*pāramitā*), probably older: (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) patience (*kṣānti*), (4) effort (*virīya*), (5) concentration (*samādhi*) and (6) wisdom (*prajñā*). These were later also increased to 10 to complement the 10 stages (*bhūmi*) of a Bodhisattva’s career, with the additional perfections: (7) skilful means (*upāya, kauśalya*), (8) resolution (*praṇidhāna*), (9) strength (*śāla*), and (10) spiritual knowledge (*jñāna*). See BHSD: *pāramitā* for refs.

<sup>14</sup> *Ito kira pubbe bhagavatā dasa dvādasa bhikkhū eka-ṭ, ṭhāne vasantā na diṭṭha, pubbā. Athassa etad ahoṣi—gaṇavāso nāmāyaṃ vaṭṭe āciṇṇa, samāciṇṇo nadī, otiṇṇa, udaka, sadiso, niraya, tiracchāna, yoni, petti, visayāsura, kāy-esu ‘pi, manussa, loka-deva, loka, brahma, lokesu ‘pi gaṇa, vāso ‘va āciṇṇo. Dasa, yojana, sahasso hi nirayo tipu, cuṇṇa, -bharitā nāḷi viya sattehi nirantaro, pañcavidha, bandhana, kamma, kāraṇakaraṇa-ṭ, ṭhāne sattānaṃ pamāṇaṃ vā paricchedo vā natthi, tathā vāsīhi tacchanādi, ṭhānesu, iti gaṇa, bhūtā ‘va paccanti. Tiracchāna, yoniyam ekasmim vammike upasikānaṃ pamāṇaṃ vā paricchedo vā natthi, tathā ekeka, bil’ādīsu ‘pi kipillik’ādīnaṃ. Tiracchāna, yoni-*

## 1.4 BENEFIT OF SPIRITUAL SOLITUDE

**1.4.1** The Commentary goes at length to give examples where the seeker, when burdened with company, failed to attain his spiritual goal. **The Bodhisattva Vipassī** wandered for seven years with 84,000 renunciants but failed to find awakening; but wandering by himself, he attained his goal in seven days. **Our Bodhisattva himself** wandered with the 5 monks for 6 years, but only when they left him, did he win his goal (MA 4:159). One might here recall the story of **Sāriputta and Moggallāna**, who, during the hill-top festival (*gir'agga samajjā*), had a spiritual experience that led them to renounce the world to become Sañjaya's pupils. But it was only after they went their separate ways that they finally met their true teachers in Assajī and the Buddha (V 1:40; J 1:85; DhA 2:84).

**1.4.2** It is important to understand here that this teaching of spiritual solitude is not that of an anti-social hermitism, but rather that mental cultivation or meditation can only be effectively by oneself alone. In the quest mental focus leading to spiritual freedom, one has to journey alone. However, once one has won the goal, one may be *with* the crowd (for its benefit), but is never *of* the crowd. Furthermore, it should be said that when one is faced with the greatest of difficulties or with the height of true success, one will be inevitably by oneself. Only when one has stepped down from that pinnacle of pain or of triumph, that one finds oneself in the company of others again. One enters this world alone; one leaves it alone. One can only understand both in one's aloneness.

**1.4.3** The purpose of physical solitude is to train oneself in mental solitude (the wholesome state of not being carried away by worldliness). When one has some mastery of mental solitude, one depends less and less on physical solitude. One can then be alone in a crowd; one can be *with* the crowd, but not *of* the crowd. In other words, physical and mental solitude helps one cultivate mental calm and clarity.

**1.4.4** Understandably some religions today discourage their followers against meditation, simply out of fear that the practitioner would discover the truths for themselves. As **Sujato** points out in his work, *A History of Mindfulness*,

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*yam pi gaṇa, vāso'va. Peta, nagarāni ca gāvutikāni aḍḍha, yojanikāni'pi peta, bharitāni honti. Evaṃ petti, visaye'pi gaṇa, vāso'va. Asura, bhavanam̐ dasa, yojana, saḥassaṃ kaṇṇe pakkhitta, sūciyā kaṇṇa, bilam̐ viya hoti. Iti asura, -kāye'pi gaṇa, vāso'va. Manussa, loke sāvattiyam̐ satta, paṇṇāsa kula, sata, saḥassāni, rāja, gahe anto ca bahi ca atṭhā, rasa manussa, koṭiyo vasimsu. Evaṃ aññesupi ṭhānesū'ti manussa, lokepi gaṇa, vāso'va. Bhumma, devatā ādim̐ katvā deva. loka, brahma. lokesu'pi gaṇa, vāso'va. Ek'ekassa hi deva, puttassa aḍḍha, tiyā nāṭaka, koṭiyo honti, nava'pi koṭiyo honti, eka-ṭ, ṭhāne dasa, saḥassā'pi brahmāno vasanti.*

*Tato cintesi—"mayā sata, saḥassa, kapp'ādhikāni cattāri asaṅkheyyāni gaṇa, vāsa, viddham̐san'attham̐ dasa pāramiyo pūritā, ime ca bhikkhū ito paṭṭhāy'eva gaṇam̐ bandhitvā gaṇābhīratā jātā ananucchavikam̐ karontī ti. So dhamma, samvegam̐ uppādetvā puna cintesi—"sace eka-ṭ, ṭhāne dvīhi bhikkhūhi na vasitabban'ti sakkā bhavēyya sikkhāpadam̐ paññāpetum̐, sikkhāpadam̐ paññāpeyyam̐, na kho panetam̐ sakkā. Handāham̐ mahā, suññatā, paṭipattim̐ nāma suttantam̐ desemi, yam̐ sikkhākāmānam̐ kula, puttānam̐ sikkhāpada, paññatti viya nagara, dvāre nikkhitta, sabba, kāyika-ādāso viya ca bhavissati. Tato yathā nām'ekasmim̐ ādāse khattiy'ādayo attano vajjam̐ disvā tam̐ pahāya anavajjā honti, evam̐ evam̐ mayi parinibbute'pi pañca, vassa, saḥassāni imam̐ suttam̐ āvajjitvā gaṇam̐ vinodetvā ekī, bhāvābhīratā kula, puttā vaṭṭa, dukkhassa antam̐ karissanti ti. Bhagavato ca manoratham̐ pūrentā viya imam̐ suttam̐ āvajjitvā gaṇam̐ vinodetvā vaṭṭa, dukkham̐ khetvā parinibbutā kula, puttā gaṇana, patham̐ vītivattā. Vālika, piṭṭhi, vihārepi hi ābhīdhammika-**abhaya-t, thero** nāma vassūpanāyika, samaye sambahulehi bhikkhūhi saddhim̐ imam̐ suttam̐ sañjhāyitvā "sammā, sambuddho evam̐ kāreti, mayam̐ kim̐ karomī ti āha. Te sabbepi anto, vasse gaṇam̐ vinodetvā ekī, bhāvābhīratā arahattam̐ pāpuṇimsu. **Gaṇa, bhedanam̐** nāma idam̐ suttan ti. (MA 4:155-157)*

**Contemplation will always remain a threat to religious orthodoxy**, since there is always the uncomfortable possibility that the truth a meditator sees may not agree with the truth that the books say they're supposed to see. However[,] in Buddhism, unlike Christianity, the contemplative life lies at the very heart of the Founder's message. (2004b:82)

**1.4.5** This spiritual aloneness is most significantly stated in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) and a number of other places, attesting to its importance:

Therefore, Ānanda, dwel with yourselves as islands, with yourselves as refuge, with no other refuge—dwell with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.

(D 16,2.26/2:100 f = 26,1/3:58, 26,27/77; S 22.43/3:42, 47.9/5:154, 47.13/5:163, 17.14/5:164)

The same Sutta goes on to say that this statement refers to the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.5 SAINTHOOD

The Mahā Suññata Sutta recounts the 4 dhyanas [§8]—that is, right concentration—and how they lead on to **streamwinning** through the attaining of dhyanas up to the formless attainments, here called “the imperturbable” (*āneñja*) [§§9-10]. It is interesting here to note that the attainment of streamwinning has directly to do with moral virtue and mindfulness regarding the body [§11], that is, right mindfulness as *satipaṭṭhāna*, “focus of mindfulness.”

The section on the path of once-returning deals with right speech [§12] and right thought [§13]. **Non-returning** is won with full understanding of the 5 cords of sensual pleasures (*pañca,kāma,guṇa*) and the total destruction of sense-desire, that is, a more refined level of right thought [§14-15].

And finally **arhathood** is attained with right view regarding the 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc'-upādāna-k,khandha*) [§16], so that the conceit “I am” is overcome [§17], and so the whole spiritual path has been traversed [§18]: this is the fruit of right view.

### 1.6 THE 2 LEVELS OF SENSE-EXPERIENCE

The Buddha here distinguishes between **2 levels of sense-experience**: that of “the 5 cords of sensual pleasure,” that is, the level of the worldling [§14], and that of “the 5 aggregates of clinging,” that is, the level of the practitioner [§16]. The 5 cords of sensual pleasure have a “binding” or “grasping” effect on one who enjoys them. The 5 aggregates of clinging, on the other hand, are natural states that arise and fall away moment to moment. If a practitioner watches this rise and fall, he would abandon the “I am” conceit, and as such be free from Māra's grip.

### 1.7 TEACHER-PUPIL RELATIONSHIP

Next follows the section on teacher-pupil relationship. The Buddha exhorts that a pupil should not look up to a teacher purely for his academic prowess, that is, proficiency in “the exposition of Suttas and Geyyā” since this is not the mark of his spiritual attainment. However, if the pupil has found a spiritually accomplished teacher, he should stay with that teacher “even if he is told to leave” [§20].

The Buddha goes on to warn of how the training of a teacher, of a pupil, and of a brahmachari<sup>16</sup> can be undone [§21]. Their **undoing** (*upaddava*) is basically caused by too much socializing and reverting to luxury even if they lead solitary lives [§§22-24.1]: this undoing is the result of wrong livelihood. Of the three undoings, however, the Buddha deems the failure of the brahmachari, that is, of a Buddhist practi-

<sup>15</sup> See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), SD 13.

<sup>16</sup> “Brahmachari,” *brahma,cāri*, ie, one living a celibate holy life: see §21 n below.

tioner, as the most serious [§24.2]. The Commentary (MA 4:165) uses a simile: falling from training in a non-Buddhist system is like falling from the back of the donkey: one is, at worst, covered with dust; but falling from monastic training is like falling from the back of an elephant, that is, where one has freely taken up the rules of training but fails to keep to them.

### 1.8 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

The Sutta closes with teachings on spiritual friendship, where the Buddha speaks on the teacher's compassion in teaching the Dharma and the pupil's proper attitude towards him [§§25-26]. This section is based on right effort.

THE POTTER SIMILE. The Buddha then makes an enigmatic declaration, "I shall not treat you as a potter treats raw damp clay," but we have clear hints from his ensuing statements: "Restraining you again and again, I will admonish you, cleansing you again and again. The core that is strong will remain standing." [§27].

A potter, we all know, shapes clay into various vessels and objects; but the Buddha does not shape anyone in this manner. The potter then fires his wares in a furnace: *the Buddha, however, trains his disciples, who then shape themselves*. When the firing is done, the potter (the Buddha) then carefully checks and tests each artifact for flaws and cracks, rejecting the flawed and cracked ones: what is rejected is the flaw, not the person.

*The Buddha points out his disciples' weaknesses and flaws so that they can correct them for his own spiritual progress.*

## 2 The 3 kinds of emptiness (practice)

2.1 The Mahā Suññata Sutta teaches the perception of emptiness in 3 ways: inwardly (*ajjhatta*) [§§9a, 10a], outwardly (*bahiddhā*) [§§9b, 10b], and alternating both ways (*ajjhatta, bahiddhā*) [§§9c, 10c], or alternatively, of internal emptiness, of external emptiness, and both of them alternatively. Evidently, these practices do not fully fruit on their own, but are best done on emerging from dhyanas. The context is clear here, as they are placed immediately after the section of the dhyanas [§§7b-8d].

Let us first look at 3 attempts at translating these important passages:<sup>17</sup>

R C Chalmers (1927):

"[He] ponders on internal emptiness...external emptiness...both internal and external emptiness."  
(*Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 1927 = M:C 2:218)

I B Horner (1959):

"[He] attends to an inward (concept of) emptiness...to an external (concept of) emptiness...to an inward and to an external (concept of) emptiness." (*Middle Length Sayings*, 1959 = M:H 3:155)

Ñānamoli (1965):

"[He] brings to mind voidness internally..externally...internally and externally."  
(*The Greater Discourse on Voidness*, 1965:6-7, 23)

Ñānamoli & Bodhi (1995):

"[He] gives attention to voidness internally...to voidness externally...to voidness internally and externally."  
(*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 1995 = M:ÑB 973)

<sup>17</sup> For full refs here, see "Textual Conventions" in the Epilegomena.

**2.2** All these translations are acceptable except in the case of Horner, where she has the amplification “concept of,” which as we have seen in **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** study.<sup>18</sup> Both the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 122) and the Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 121), it is vital to note, shows that the “emptiness” here is an exercise in the attending to what is absent and what is present that in due course leads to a direct experience of freedom.

**2.3** The Commentary explains the phrase “**abiding in emptiness internally**” (*ajjhataṃ suññataṃ ... viharitum*) [§6], as meaning that it is as if one were alone, though sitting in the midst of company (MA 4:159). “Internally” refers to his one’s sense-spheres (*gocar’ajjhataṃ eva*), or one’s own 5 aggregates (MA 1:161). Attending to emptiness **externally** (*bahiddhā*) refers to contemplating on the 5 aggregates in someone else in the same way. **Bodhi** notes,

The emptiness spoken of here thus must be the temporary deliverance of mind reached through the insight contemplation of non-self, as explained at [**Mahā Vedalla S**, M 43,33/1:297 f]. When the insight into non-self is brought to the level of the path, it issues in the fruition experiencing Nibbāna by way of its aspects of emptiness.

(M:ÑB 1334 n 1152, emphases added)

The sutta formulation includes the progression *ajjhataṃ ... bahiddhā ... ajjhata, bahiddhā*, just as for all the 4 satipatthanas.<sup>19</sup> This is not merely a mechanical process. **Gethin** explains that this repetition has

to do with the blurring of distinction between self and other—something which is, of course, entirely consistent with the notion of not-self in Buddhist thought. Thus as the *bhikkhu* watches body, feelings, mind and *dhammas* within, without, within and without, rather than seeing a world made up of distinct ‘persons’ or ‘selves,’ he becomes progressively aware of a world of *dhamma* made up entirely of *dhammas* of all of which are ‘not-self.

(*The Buddhist Path of Awakening*, 2001:54 f)

**2.4 Peter Skilling**, in his comparative study of the early sutras, *Mahāsūtras: The great discourses of the Buddha*, has a very useful discussion on these threefold emptiness.<sup>20</sup> After noting the various modern English translations noted above, he adds, “When translating from the Tibetan, I render the terms as ‘inward emptiness,’ etc, in the hope that this gives at least a hint of the adverbial sense.” (1997:378)

**2.5** The emptiness practice of the Mahā Suññata Sutta is presented as leading to the attainment of “the imperturbable” [§§9.4, 10.4], that is, the fourth formless attainment. This stage of practice will be examined in the next section.

### 3 Kinds of freedom

#### **3.1 THE IMPERTURBABLE (ĀNEÑJA)**

The Vinaya Commentary glosses *āneñja* as *acala*, “unshaking, steady” (VA 157). The words *ānañja* (BHS *āniñjya*), *āṇañja*, *aneja*, *anejja*, *aneñja*, *aneja*, and *āneñja* are synonyms, with *iñjati* (Ved *rñjāte*, ts) as

<sup>18</sup> See SD 11.3(7).

<sup>19</sup> See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 2:292 passim) & **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,5/1:56 passim), SD 10.1.

<sup>20</sup> Skilling 1997:377-383.

the verb and *iñjita* (ts) as the adjective.<sup>21</sup> The adjective “imperturbable” (*aniñjita*) [§9.4] is an important canonical technical term describing the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana and the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa,samāpatti*).<sup>22</sup>

However, in **the Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) and **the Āneñja Sappāya Sutta** (M 106), only the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana and the two lower formless attainments are discussed as “the imperturbable,”<sup>23</sup> the higher 2 attainments are discussed separately elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> All the states below the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana—the first 3 form dhyanas and lower mental states—are classified as “the perturbable” (*iñjita*). It is interesting to note that even the attaining of “the imperturbable” does not guarantee one’s attaining even of streamwinning [§9.4].

The Mahā Suññata Sutta Commentary on §9.4 says of the Buddha: “Thinking, I will be freed both ways,”<sup>25</sup> he attends to the formless attainment and imperturbability (*āneñja,arūpa,samāpatti*) (MA 4:161).

### 3.2 TEMPORARY FREEDOM AND UNCONDITIONAL FREEDOM

**3.2.1** The expression “freed both ways” (MA 4:161) [3.1] refers to the freedom of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable] [1.2], or in the freedom of mind that is unconditioned [time-free] and unshakable [§4.1+2]. The former is freedom through the dhyanas and the formless attainments, the latter is the freedom through the supramundane paths and fruits. **The Mahā Sārōpama Sutta** (M 29) mentions one who goes forth out of faith, reflecting on the nature of suffering, and in due course attains the unconditional liberation (*asamaya vimokkha*) (M 29,6).<sup>26</sup>

The “unconditional unshakable freedom of mind” (*asāmāyikā akuppā ceto,vimutti*) is the freedom from the defilements and that has nothing to do with the temporal, that is, unconditioned by time. As such, it is freedom that is immovable and supramundane. It consists of “the four noble paths and the four fruits of recluseship” (that is, the paths and fruits) (MA 4:159), which quoting **the Paṭisambhidā-magga** (Pm 2:40), adds nirvana.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3 THE 2 KINDS OF FREEDOM

More commonly, the two types of freedom are called the “freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom.” They are respectively *ceto,vimutti* (or, freedom by concentration) and *paññā,vimutti* (or, freedom by wisdom) (A 1:60). The one *freed of mind* has destroyed all the mental hindrances, and as such could attain dhyana at will. The one *freed by wisdom* “may not have reached the 8 liberations (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70,16/1:478).

All arhats are perfectly freed in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha,vimokkha*), which include the four formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called **freed both ways**, that is, freed from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood.

<sup>21</sup> See CPD: *ānañja*; BHSD: *āniñjya*.

<sup>22</sup> See **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,22-34/1:454-456), SD 28.11; also MA 3:171.

<sup>23</sup> M 105,10/2:254 & M 106,3-9/2:262-264.

<sup>24</sup> See V 3:4; cf M 2:229 where wrong views regarding the imperturbable are discussed.

<sup>25</sup> That is, the freedom of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable], or in the freedom of mind that is not temporary [unconditioned by time] and unshakable [§4.2].

<sup>26</sup> M 29,6/1:197,27+28 (SD 53.8).

<sup>27</sup> See M:ÑB 1224 n348.



Arhats like Sāriputta, Moggallāna, and Saḷha are “freed both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of freedom are given in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15)<sup>28</sup> and **the Kīṭā, giri Sutta** (M 70).<sup>29</sup>

## 4 The Buddha and visitors

### 4.1 ADVICE TO VISITORS

All the 3 versions of the Mahā Suññata Sutta recount how the Buddha treats his visitors by saying that he would instruct them with a mind bent on solitude. However, the Pali version stand alone in mentioning “kings, the kings’ chief ministers, other religious teachers, the disciples of other religious teachers” [§6]. The relevant Pali passage reads:

*Tatr’ Ānanda Tathāgato viveka, ninnen’eva cittena viveka, poṇena viveka, pabbhārena vūpakaṭṭhena nekkhammābhiratena vyanti, bhūtena sabbaso āsava-ṭṭhāniyehi dhammehi añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyuttaṃ y’eva kathaṃ kattā hoti.*

Then, Ānanda, with a mind bent on solitude, leaning towards solitude, inclining towards solitude, mentally aloof (from distractions), delighting in renunciation of sense delights, and totally done with things that are the bases for mental influxes,

he is one who only speaks in connection with rousing them in the wholesome (and then dismissing them).  
(M 122,6.2/3:111 ≈ A 4:233)

### 4.2 UYYOJETI

**4.2.1** In the last section—*añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyutta y’eva kathaṃ kattā hoti*—the word *uyyojaniya* can be rendered in two ways: (1) to inspire, incite<sup>30</sup> [§4.3] and (2) to dismiss.<sup>31</sup> The Commentary reading, *uyyojanika, paṭisaṃyuttaṃ*, explains that, in saying, “You may go!” the expression is thus connected with words of dismissal, *uyyojanikena vacanena*. The Commentary continues:

When the Blessed One, after a meal, having lain down (to rest) and then risen ... went into the attainment of the fruits. At that time, the company assembled to hear the Dharma. The Blessed One ... taught Dharma, and without letting pass the right time (to hear it), he *viveka, ninnena citena parisāṃ uyyojeti*.  
(MA 4:160)

**4.2.2** The Pali phrase here could be rendered in either of two ways: (1) “he inspired (them) with a mind bent on solitude,” or (2) “he dismissed (them) with a mind bent of solitude.” The verb *uyyojeti* itself is ambiguous,<sup>32</sup> and according to **I B Horner**:

<sup>28</sup> D 15,35/2:70 f (SD 5.17); also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120,37/3:103 (SD 3.4.37).

<sup>29</sup> M 70,16-17/1:477 f @ SD 11.1 (5.2(2A)).

<sup>30</sup> The stock formula here is *Dhammiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādhapetvā samuṭṭejetvā sampahaṃsetvā*: V 1:16, 30, 2:193, 3:138, 4:50, 93, 160, 235, 5:19; D 2:86, 3:209; S 4:183, 329; M 3:276; A 3:75, 5:182; J 3:265; U 87. [4.3]

<sup>31</sup> V 1:179; M 1:524; A 3:75; J 1:119, 293, 3:188, 4:452, 5:217, 6:72.

<sup>32</sup> *Uyyojeti* (Skt *ud-yojayati*) is caus of *uyyuñjati* (he goes away; makes effort, is active). SED: *ud-√yuj* defines *udyojayati* (caus) only as “to excite, incite, make active or quick, stimulate to exertion.” BHSD however gives both meanings: (1) he dismisses (Sikś 56.2), and (2) Tib *brtson par ḥgyur* = (to be) made zealous. Edgerton (BHSD) also shows that the meaning depends on the context (p132). See also CPD: *uyyojeti*; DP: *uyyojana*; PED: *uyyojeti*.

could mean either: with his mind tending to aloofness he dismissed the company; or: with his mind tending to aloofness he inspired the company... It is possible that *uyyojeti* should be understood in both its meanings: that the Lord incited the company to seek aloofness for themselves and also dismissed them in order that they might do so. If we were to take *uyyojeti* only as ‘he dismisses,’ this would imply a certain selfishness on the Lord’s part, and the AA (4:122) is apparently against this: *tesaṃ upaṭṭhāna,gamanakaṃ yevā ti attho*, the meaning is going to their service (ie helping them). (M:H 3:154 n8)

**4.2.3** Horner<sup>33</sup> goes on to point out that the phrase *añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya,paṭisaṃyutta y’eva kathaṃ kattā hoti*<sup>34</sup> also occurs in **the (Mahā,purisa,vitakka) Anuruddha Sutta** (A 8.30),<sup>35</sup> where the Commentary gives a different explanation, saying that the phrase *uyyojaniya,paṭisaṃyutta,kathā* refers to talk that is going to be of support for the listeners (*tesaṃ upaṭṭhāna,gamanakaṃ*, AA 4:122). This alternative rendition, notes **Analayo**,

based on the meaning of *uyyojeti* as “inciting,” finds support in the Chinese and Tibetan parallels to M 122, as according to MĀ 191,<sup>36</sup> on such occasions, the Buddha would “speak Dharma to advise and help visitors, 說法勸助, and according to the Tibetan version in Skilling 1994: 202,8, the Buddha would “exchange pleasant words” with the visitors and “proceed to give them a discourse on the Dhamma” [Analayo’s tr], *phan tshun kun dga’ bar gtam ‘dre bar smra, phebs par smra zhing chos kyi gtam yang zer ro*. This is in fact what one would expect, since the Buddha to talk to others with the intention of dismissing could seem to be, as Horner 1959:155 n8 remarks, “a certain selfishness” on his part. (Analayo 2005 ad M 3:112 n; citations normalized)

#### 4.3 STAGES IN TEACHING

**4.3.1** A number of suttas report that the Buddha or Ānanda or a teacher as “having instructed (*sandasse-tvā*), inspired (*samādapetvā*), roused (*samuṭṭejetvā*) and gladdened (*sampahaṃsetvā*) ... with a Dharma talk.”<sup>37</sup> This action-sequence reflects the basic structure of **the Buddha’s teaching method**: (1) the Dharma is shown; (2) the listeners are enthused; (3) they are fired with commitment and action; and (4) filled with joy. (This sequence, of course, also applies to an individual listener.)

**4.3.2** The Commentaries<sup>38</sup> explain that by instructing, the Buddha dispels the listener’s **delusion**; by inspiring him, **heedlessness** is dispelled; by rousing him, **indolence** is dispelled; and by gladdening, brings the practice to a **conclusion**. In short, when we teach Dharma to benefit others, we should do our best to **bring instruction, inspiration, motivation and joy** to the listener. These 4 qualities are, in fact, the 6<sup>th</sup> or last of the ideal skills of a sufficiently capable monastic.<sup>39</sup> Clearly here we see the Buddha far from dismissing his audience, but instructing them on the spiritual path.

<sup>33</sup> M:H 3:154 n8.

<sup>34</sup> E M Hare renders this as “(he) entirely confines his talk to the subject of going apart” (A:H 4:158).

<sup>35</sup> Ie the famous discourse in “the 8 thoughts of the great man,” A 8.30.21/4:233,33. See SD 5.18 (5).

<sup>36</sup> MĀ 191 T1.738b20.

<sup>37</sup> V 1:18; D 1:126, 149, 2:86, 98, 109, 110, 127, 3:27, 209; M 1:209, 354, 2:139, 3:155; S 2:215, 3:95, 4:183, 5:155; A 3:380, 4:67, 118, 307 (x2), 5:122, 125; U 39, 82, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Eg DA 1:293; cf VA 1:65; MA 2:35.

<sup>39</sup> See **(Aṭṭhaka) Alaraṃ S** (A 8,62,2), SD 46.5. See L S Cousins, in his review of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (tr Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi) in JBE 4 1997:272, where gives a slightly different listing of the above.

**4.3.3** However, the context of the Mahā Suññata Sutta is clear: it is about emptiness and solitude for the sake of personal development. Reflecting on the dual meaning of the word *uyyojeti* [4.2], as used in the Suttas, we can surmise, as Horner suggests, that here the Buddha both inspires his audience and also dismisses then in due course, so that the Dharma session does turn into a socializing session, but to spur one on for spiritual practice and realization. I have applied both these senses in my translation.

## 5 Related suttas

**5.1** The Mahā Suññata Sutta should be studied together with the **Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121) which opens with a mention of the Buddha’s own “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) (M 121,3/3:104), and goes on to elaborate the “truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.”<sup>40</sup> **Choong Mun-keat** makes a useful observation on the relationship between the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 121) and the Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122), that in M 121 “the practice proceeds vertically, step by step ... through the fading away of ... perception in the process of practising emptiness” up to the apex of emptiness in the destruction of the influxes. M 122, however, “proceeds horizontally from inner to outer.” (1999:83)

**5.2** The Sutta should be studied with **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66/1:447-456), especially M 66,17-34. In fact, §§30-34 elaborates on the various “imperturbable” states, that is, the formless states. The Laṭukikôpama Sutta Commentary gives detailed explanations of a number of important terms common to both suttas.<sup>41</sup>

**5.3** The section of “Teacher & Pupil” (especially §§19-24) should be studied with **the Lohicca Sutta** (D 12), where it is stated that wrong view leads one to one of two destinies: the hells or the animal kingdom. The Sutta further mentions four kinds of teachers: the first three are false teachers, only the fourth is an accomplished one:

- (1) A teacher who is not accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils do not wish to listen to him.
- (2) A teacher who is not accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils listen to him.
- (3) A teacher who is accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils do not wish to listen to him.
- (4) A teacher who is accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils listen to him.

— — —

<sup>40</sup> M 121,4/3:105 passim as refrain: *yathā, bhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā suññatāvakkanti*.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, §§3, 9.4 below.

# Mahā Suññata Sutta

## The Greater Discourse on Emptiness

M 122

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyas in Nigrodha's Park<sup>42</sup> outside Kapila,vatthu.

### The crowded lodgings

2 Then, the Blessed One, having dressed himself in the morning and taking robe and bowl, entered Kapila,vatthu for alms.

Having gone into Kapila,vatthu for alms, he returned from the almsround and finished his meal; then went to the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka<sup>43</sup> the Sakya for his midday rest.

2.2 Now, at that time, there were many bedding and seats<sup>44</sup> prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka the Sakya.

Having seen that there were many bedding and seats [110] prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka the Sakya, the Blessed One thought:

“There are many bedding and seats prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka the Sakya. Do so many monks stay here?”

2.3 Now at that time, the venerable Ānanda, along with many monks, was busy making robes in the dwelling of Ghaṭṭāya the Sakya.<sup>45</sup>

2.4 Then, the Blessed One, after emerging from his retreat, went to Ghaṭṭāya the Sakya's dwelling, and sat down on the prepared seat.

2.5 Seated thus, the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“Ānanda, there are many bedding and seats prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka the Sakya. Do so many monks stay here?”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Comy on **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14) says that Nigrodha was a Sakya. He came to Kapilavatthu and made a dwelling for the Buddha in his own park, and presented it to him (MA 2:61).

<sup>43</sup> Khemaka was his name, and had a dark complexion (*kāḷa*) (MA 4:155).

<sup>44</sup> “Bedding and seats” (*senāsana*): various kinds, such as beds, stools, bolsters and pillows [Horner “mattresses”], straw mats, strips of hide, grass, leaves, branches, all laid out ... touching one another; for this is where groups of monks were staying (*mañico pīṭhaṃ bhisī, bimbohanaṃ taṭṭikā camma, khaṇḍo tiṇa, santhāro paṇṇa, santhāro palāla, santhāro ti-ādīni paññattāni honti ... āhacca ṭhapitāni, gaṇa, bhikkhūnaṃ vasana-ṭ, ṭhāna, sadisaṃ ahoṣi*, MA 4:155). Below [§§2.2, 23.2, 24.3], tr as “lodging,” ie a place to stay, often with bedding and seats as well.

<sup>45</sup> *Ghaṭṭāya*. This is the only place it is mentioned. M:ÑB takes his name as Ghāṭā, but the reading is cpd *Ghaṭṭāya, sakkassa*, as followed by I B Horner (M:H 3:153) & Malalasekera (DPPN). Like Kāḷa Khemaka's dwelling, Ghaṭṭāya's was also built in Nigrodha's Park monastery (MA 4:157). See Skilling 1997:372 for a discussion.

<sup>46</sup> Comy: A rhetorical question since buddhas can know whatever they wish to know. The Buddha thinks: “As soon as these monks form into a group and delight in the group, they will act improperly. I shall expound ‘the discourse called the practice of great emptiness’ (*mahā, suññatā, paṭipattim nāma suttantaṃ*) which, like a city gate or like a mirror for the whole body, will be like a training-rule for those noble youths who delight in training.” (MA 4:156). All versions agree that a large group of monks have gathered at Sakya Ghaṭṭāya's residence, behaving in an excessively sociable manner. Only Tib version differs in saying that many monks have left Kāḷa Khemaka's residence, leaving many mats (Tib *stan, āsana*) in the open (Tib *bla gab med par, abhyavakāśam*)—showing their heedlessness. Skilling: “indeed the wording of the Tibetan *Mahāsūnyatā* brings to mind the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> *pāyantikā* of the Prātimokṣa” (1997:373 f). However, Vinaya of both Theravāda and of Mūlasarvāstivāda do not refer to this incident.

2.6 “Yes, bhante, there are many bedding and seats prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷa Khemaka the Sakya. Many monks are staying there. Bhante, this is our **robe-making time**.”<sup>47</sup>

### Wrong livelihood: Where a monk shines not

3 “Ānanda, a monk does not shine [is not beautiful]<sup>48</sup> who delights in company, enjoys company, is devoted to delighting in company; enjoys the group, is pleased with a group.<sup>49</sup>

3.2 Indeed, Ānanda, for a monk *who delights in company, enjoys company, is devoted to delighting in company; enjoys a group, is pleased with a group*, that he would attain, at will, without difficulty, the joy of renunciation, the joy of solitude, the joy of peace, the joy of self-awakening<sup>50</sup>—this is not possible.

3.3 But, Ānanda, for a monk who lives alone, away from company, it is expected<sup>51</sup> that he would attain, at will, without difficulty, the joy of renunciation, the joy of solitude, the joy of peace, the joy of self-awakening<sup>52</sup>—this is possible.

4 Indeed, Ānanda, for a monk *who delights in company, enjoys company, is devoted to delighting in company; enjoys the group, is pleased with a group*, it is not possible that he would attain at will without difficulty the joy of renunciation,<sup>53</sup> the joy of solitude,<sup>54</sup> the joy of peace,<sup>55</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Comy: Ānanda intends to say: “These monks are living in this manner not that they delight in being busy, but on account of their making robes” (MA 4:158).

<sup>48</sup> “Shines” (*sobhati*) in the Buddha’s teaching (MA 4:158).

<sup>49</sup> “Company,” *saṅgaṇika*; “the group,” *gaṇa*.” Comy: “**company**” (*saṅgaṇika*) is a gathering of one’s own group; “**the group**” (*gaṇa*) is a gathering of various persons, or “society” (MA 4:158). The phrase is found in **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) where it is given as the 4<sup>th</sup> condition of 2<sup>nd</sup> set of 7 conditions for non-decline (*aparāhāniya, dham-mā*): “Monks, so long as monks do not delight in company, do not find pleasure in company, are not caught up with delight in company, then, monks, growth for the monks is to be expected, not their decline.” (D 16,1.7/2:78), SD 9.

<sup>50</sup> This conduces to the attaining the goal of awakening to the path (MA 4:158).

<sup>51</sup> *Pāṭikañkham*.

<sup>52</sup> This conduces to the attaining the goal of awakening to the path (MA 4:158).

<sup>53</sup> MA 4:158. It is noteworthy that MĀ 191 (T1.738a24) refers to this *nekkhamma, sukha* [§3] as 無欲之樂, lit, “happiness of no desire,” while Tib in Skilling 1994:196,3 speaks of “going forth happiness” (Analayo’s tr), *nges par ’byung ba’i bde ba dang*. Bapat 1969:3 remarks that the use of 無欲 shows awareness of the correct form *naiṣkāmya*, instead of the form *naiṣkrāmya* found regularly in later Buddhist texts (cf Lalitavistara in Lefmann 1902:136,8 or Mvat, Senart 1882a:173,13); a form which underlies Tib rendering as “going forth” (Analayo 2005 ad M 3:111 n). Comy glosses *nekkhamma, sukha* as *kāmato nikkhantassa sukhaṃ*, “happiness of the giving up of sense-pleasure” (MA 4:158). Unfortunately, although I found *naiṣkrāmya* in BHSD and in SED, I was unable to locate *naiṣkāmya* in either; but cf PED: *nekkhamma*.

<sup>54</sup> That is, aloofness from sense-pleasures (MA 4:158).

<sup>55</sup> This peace conduces to allaying lust, ill will and ignorance (see MA 4:158).

the joy of self-awakening,<sup>56</sup>  
 it is not possible he would ever attain and abide  
 either in **the freedom of mind** that is temporary and pleasant [desirable],<sup>57</sup>  
 or in the freedom of mind that is unconditioned [time-free] and unshakable.<sup>58</sup>

#### THE 2 KINDS OF FREEDOM

4.2 But, Ānanda, for a monk who lives alone, away from company, it is expected that he would attain and abide either in **[111] the freedom of mind** that is temporary and pleasant [desirable], or in the freedom of mind that is unconditioned and unshakable.<sup>59</sup>

### Right mindfulness: The true nature of form

5 Ānanda, I do not see a single form,<sup>60</sup> from whose change and alteration there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, (physical) pain, (mental) displeasure, and despair in one who lusts for it and delights in it.

#### THE BUDDHA'S OWN ABIDING IN EMPTINESS

6 However, Ānanda, there is this abode awakened to by the Tathagata [Thus Come],<sup>61</sup> namely, that which is attained by abiding in emptiness internally [in the inner emptiness]<sup>62</sup> by not attending to any meditation sign.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Yan taṃ nekkhamma, sukhaṃ paviveka, sukhaṃ upasama, sukhaṃ sambodha, sukhaṃ, tassa sukhasa nikāma, -lābhī bhavissati akicchā, lābhī akasira, lābhī ti, n'etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati.* See **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66), where Buddha says that such joy “should be pursued, that it should be cultivated, that it should be developed, that it should not be feared” (M 66,21/1:444). Comy there explains dhyanas as *nekkhamma, sukha* (the joy of the letting-go of sense-pleasures), bringing the bliss from renouncing sense-pleasures; as *paviveka, sukha* (the joy of solitude), bringing the bliss of being aloof from the crowd and from defilements; as *upasama, sukha* (the joy of peace), their bliss is for the purpose of stilling the defilements; and as *sambodha, sukha* (the joy of self-awakening), their bliss is for the purpose of awakening” (MA 4:158). The dhyanas by themselves, however, are not states of awakening.

<sup>57</sup> “The freedom of mind that is temporary and pleasant” (*sāmāyikā kantā ceto.vimutti*). The concentrated mind is free from the defilements. Comy qu Pm 2:40 says that this temporary freedom consists in the attainment of the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless spheres (MA 4:158). See **Mahā Sārōpama S** (M 29.6/1:196 f; M:H 1:243).

<sup>58</sup> “The freedom of mind ... unshakable,” *sāmāyikaṃ vā kantaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ upasampajja viharissati asāmāyikaṃ vā akuppan ti*. The former is temporary freedom through the dhyanas and the formless attainments, the latter is unshakable freedom through the supramundane paths and fruits. **Mahā Sārōpama S** (M 29) mentions one who goes forth out of faith, reflecting on the nature of suffering, and in due course attains the unconditional liberation (*asamaya vimokkha*) (M 29,6/1:196). See foll n.

<sup>59</sup> *Asāmāyikā akuppā ceto, vimutti*. This is freedom from the defilements, that has nothing to do with the temporal, ie unconditioned by time. As such, it is freedom that is immovable and supramundane, comprising “the 4 noble paths and the 4 fruits of recluseship” (MA 4:159), qu Pm 2:40 where nirvana is added. See SD 55.9 (1.3.2.7(D)).

<sup>60</sup> Comy glosses with “body” (*sarīra*) (MA 4:159). See prec n.

<sup>61</sup> Comy: The Buddha begins with this passage to prevent any criticism that while he enjoins his disciples to live in solitude, he himself is often surrounded by a large retinue. “Emptiness” here refers to the fruition attainment of emptiness. **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121) opens with a mention of the Buddha's own “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) (M 121,4/3:104), and where this section is elaborated.

<sup>62</sup> “Abiding in emptiness internally” (*ajjhataṃ suññataṃ ... viharitum*), ie, he is as if alone, though sitting in the midst of company (MA 4:159). Cf §9.1. See (2).

<sup>63</sup> The Buddha alludes to this in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,45.3), SD 49.4.

6.2 Now, Ānanda, if while the Tathagata is abiding in this manner, he is visited by monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, kings, the kings' chief ministers, other religious teachers, the disciples of other religious teachers,

then, Ānanda, with a mind bent on solitude, leaning towards solitude, inclining towards solitude, mentally aloof (from distractions), delighting in renunciation, and totally done with things that are the bases for mental influxes,<sup>64</sup>

he is one who only speaks in connection with rousing them in the wholesome and then dismissing them.<sup>65</sup>

7 Therefore, Ānanda, if a monk were to wish:

'May I attain and abide in emptiness within [the inner emptiness],'

then, Ānanda, that monk should steady his mind internally, compose it, make it one-pointed, concentrate it.<sup>66</sup>

### Right concentration: The 4 dhyanas

7.2 And how, Ānanda, does the monk steady his mind internally, compose it, make it one-pointed, concentrate it?

8 Here, Ānanda, the monk, quite detached from sense-objects, detached from unwholesome mental states, enters and dwells in **the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana**, accompanied by initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), accompanied by zest (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), born of solitude [ie *samādhi*].

8.2 Furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,

enters and dwells in **the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.<sup>67</sup> He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of concentration.

<sup>64</sup> "Mental influxes," *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit "inflow, outflow") comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (ie, either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously tr as "influxes, taints ('deadly taints,' RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence)," or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj'āsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also called "floods" (*ogha*) or "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55/3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

<sup>65</sup> *Tatr' ānanda Tathāgato viveka, ninnen'eva cittena viveka, poṇena viveka, pabbhārena vūpakaṭṭhena nekkham-mābhiratena vyanti, bhūtena sabbaso āsava-ṭ, ṭhāniyehi dhammehi añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyuttaṃ y'eva kathaṃ kattā hoti* (M 3:111 ~ A 8.30/4:233 @ SD 19.5). On the difficulty of this passage, see (4).

<sup>66</sup> "Then, Ānanda, ... he should ... concentrate it," *ten'ānanda bhikkhunā ajjhattam eva citta. saṅghapetabbaṃ sannisādetabbaṃ ekodikatappaṃ samādahātabbaṃ*. This latter sentence very similar to the one in **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,10/1:116), SD 61.1; (**Catukka**) **Samādhi S 3** (A 4.94/2:94), SD 41.3.

<sup>67</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana is known as "the noble silence" (*ariya, tuṇhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (*vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to "either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence" (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

8.3 And furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the fading away of zest, remains equanimous, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences happiness with the body.

He enters and dwells in **the 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana**,<sup>68</sup>

of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the happiness free from zest.

8.4 And furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain,<sup>69</sup> and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure, attains and dwells in **the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.<sup>70</sup>

This is how, Ānanda, the monk steadies his mind internally, composes it, brings it to one-pointedness, concentrates it. [112]

Thus he attends to **emptiness internally**.<sup>71</sup>

## THE PATH TO STREAMWINNING<sup>72</sup>

### Wrong concentration: Attending to emptiness and the imperturbable

9 While he attends to **emptiness internally**, his mind does not plunge into [does not rejoice in] the emptiness *internally*, nor does he brighten up with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he freed.

When it is thus, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness *internally*,

my mind did not plunge into the emptiness *internally*, nor did I brighten up with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

In this way he attends to emptiness externally.<sup>73</sup>

9.2 While he attends to **emptiness externally**, his mind does not plunge into emptiness *externally*, nor does he brighten up with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness *externally*, my mind did not plunge into emptiness *externally*, nor did I brighten up with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them. In this way he attends to emptiness internally and externally.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ce:BJT gives only part of this line and the next but misreading it as *catuttha jhānaṃ* [sic].

<sup>69</sup> “Joy ... pain,” *sukha, dukkha*, refers to physical feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa, somanassa*—refers to mental feelings, which have been transcended earlier. Mental feelings need to be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from the physical sense-contacts) are transcended. On the significance of this, see **Sall’atthēna S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

<sup>70</sup> Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana—equanimity (*upekhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5.4).

<sup>71</sup> “Internally,” ie, to his own sense-spheres (*gocar’ajjhattam eva*) or his own 5 aggregates (MA 1:161). See §6 & n above. See also Intro (2).

<sup>72</sup> See Intro (1.5).

<sup>73</sup> That is, to the 5 aggregates of another person (MA 4:161).

<sup>74</sup> That is, sometimes to himself, sometimes to another (MA 1:161). This “internal/external/internal-external” pattern is also found in connection with mindfulness practice in **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 2:292 passim) & **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,5/1:56 passim). See SD 10.1 (5). See §9a n above.



9.3 While he attends to **emptiness internally and externally**, his mind does not plunge into emptiness *internally and externally*, nor does he brighten up with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness *internally and externally*,  
my mind did not plunge into emptiness *externally or externally*,  
nor did I brighten up with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

Thus he attends to the imperturbable.<sup>75</sup>

9.4 While he attends to **the imperturbable**, his mind does not rejoice in [does not plunge into] the imperturbable, nor does he brighten up with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to the imperturbable,  
my mind did not rejoice in [did not plunge into] the imperturbable,  
nor did I brighten up with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I freed.’

In this way he clearly comprehends them.

### Right concentration: Freedom through emptiness and the imperturbable

**10** Then, Ānanda, that monk should steady his mind internally, compose it, make it one-pointed, concentrate it on that same concentration sign as before.<sup>76</sup>

He attends to **emptiness internally**.

While he attends to emptiness internally, his mind plunges into the emptiness *internally*.

He brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is freed.

When it is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness *internally*, my mind plunged into the emptiness *internally*,  
I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

10.2 He attends to **emptiness externally**.

While he attends to emptiness externally, his mind rejoices in [plunges into] emptiness *externally*.

He brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness *externally*, my mind plunged into emptiness *externally*,  
I *brightened* with faith, I was mentally *steadied*, I was *freed*.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

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<sup>75</sup> “The imperturbable,” *āneñja* or *ānañja*, ie the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment. Comy says of the Buddha, “Thinking, I will become free both ways,” he attends to the formless attainment and imperturbability, *āneñja, arūpa, samāpatti* (MA 4:161). See Intro (3a).

<sup>76</sup> Comy: This refers to dhyana used as the basis for insight. If, after emerging from this basic dhyana, his mind does not enter into emptiness through insight contemplation on his own aggregates or those of others, and he also cannot attain the imperturbable (formless attainment), he should return and attend to it repeatedly. (MA 4:161).

10.3 He attends to **emptiness internally and externally**.

While he attends to emptiness *internally and externally*, his mind plunges into emptiness *internally and externally*,

he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness internally and externally, my mind plunged into emptiness *externally*,

I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

10.4 He attends to **the imperturbable**.

While he attends to the imperturbable, his mind plunges into the imperturbable,

he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is freed.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to the imperturbable, my mind plunged into the imperturbable, I brightened up with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was freed.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

### Right mindfulness: Minding the 4 postures<sup>77</sup>

**11** Ānanda, with that monk who abides thus, if his mind is inclined to **walking** up and down, he walks, thinking:

‘While I am walking up and down thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure,<sup>78</sup> neither bad nor unwholesome states, **[113]** will overpower me.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> This whole section expands on the mindfulness of the 4 postures briefly stated in **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22,3/-2:292), SD 13.2, = (M 10,6/1:56 f), SD 13.3.

<sup>78</sup> “Covetousness and displeasure,” *abhijjhā,domanassaṃ*, which Walshe (1995:335 & n632) renders as “hankering and fretting for the world”; alt tr “longing and displeasure” or “longing and loathing.” MA says that covetousness and displeasure signify the first two hindrances—sensual desire and ill will—principal hindrances to be overcome for the practice to succeed. They thus represent the contemplation of mind-objects, which begins with the 5 hindrances. Cf M 1:274/39.13; see also **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,13) and **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36) on how to deal with the hindrances in one’s meditation. The monk effects the abandoning of the hindrances by the contemplations of impermanence, fading away (of lust), cessation (of suffering) and letting go (of defilements), and thus comes to look upon the object with equanimity. On *abhijjhā,domanassa*, there is an interesting related passage from **Pubba or Pubb’eva Sambodha S**: “Monks, before my awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, this thought occurred to me... ‘Whatever physical and mental joy (*sukha,somanassa*) there is in the world, that is the gratification (*assāda*) in the world; that the world is impermanent, suffering and of the nature to change, ie the wretchedness (*ādīnava*) in the world—the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world, that is the escape from the world’.” (A 1:258/ 3.101, pointed out to me by Robert Eddison). My understanding here regarding the naming of the first two mental hindrances as *abhijjhā,domanassa* is to show that with their elimination the other hindrances are eliminated, too—a view confirmed by Ajahn Brahmavaṃso (30 March 2003). This is further confirmed by Comys: “But here since taking *abhijjhā* includes *kāma-c,chanda*, and taking *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda*, therefore it should be understood that the abandoning of the hindrances is spoken of by indicating the pair that is strong among those items that make up the hindrances” (DA 3:759 = MA 1:244 = VbhA 220). Here Gethin adds a parenthetical note: “The taking of *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda* because all *citt[ā]* rooted in aversion is accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling.” (2001:49 f & n95).

<sup>79</sup> “Fully aware,” ie, to this meditation exercise (*kamma-ṭ,ṭhāna*) (MA 4:162).

11.2 Ānanda, with that monk who abides thus, if his mind is inclined to **standing**, he stands, thinking:

‘While I am standing thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither bad nor unwholesome states will overpower me.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

11.3 <sup>80</sup>Ānanda, with that monk who abides thus, if his mind is inclined to **sitting down**, he sits down, thinking:

‘While I am sitting down thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither bad nor unwholesome states, will overpower me.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

11.4 <sup>81</sup>Ānanda, with that that monk who abides thus, if his mind is inclined to **lying down**, he lies down, thinking:

‘While I am lying down thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither bad nor unwholesome states will overpower me.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

## THE PATH TO ONCE-RETURNING<sup>82</sup>

### Right speech

12 Ānanda, with that monk who abides thus, if his mind is inclined to **talking**,<sup>83</sup> he resolves:

ANIMAL TALK<sup>84</sup>

‘Such chatter that is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial, and that does not lead to revulsion, to fading away [of lust],<sup>85</sup> to ending [of suffering],<sup>86</sup> to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, talk about kings, robbers, ministers of state, armies, danger, and wars [battles], about food and drink, about clothing, beds [furniture], garlands and scents, about relatives, about vehicles, about villages, towns, cities, and the countryside, about women, heroes, [D 1:8] gossips of the street and at the well, tales of the dead, tales about diversity [philosophical discussions of the past and future], talk about the creation of the world and of the sea, and talk about whether things exist or not [or, talk about gain and loss]<sup>87</sup>–

<sup>80</sup> This whole section on *nisajjāya*, “to sit down,” omitted from Ce:BJT.

<sup>81</sup> This whole section on *sayanāya*, “to lie down,” omitted from Ce:BJT.

<sup>82</sup> See Intro (1.5).

<sup>83</sup> Be Ce Ee *lathāya*; Se *bhāsāya*.

<sup>84</sup> Although unstated, this is *tiracchāna, kathā*, or “animal talk,” as animals mostly walk parallel to the ground, so this kind of talk does not lead on upwards. On destiny of wrong views, see **Lohicca S** (D 12.10/1:228). See V 1:188; D 1:7 f, 178, 3:36; M 1:113, 513, 2:1, 23; S 5:419; A 5:128; also D:RD 3:33; S:W 5:355; A:W 5:86. At DA 89, *gehasita, kathā* (householder talk) is grouped with *tiracchāna, kathā*. See Pācittiya 85 where the group of 6 monks indulged in such talk (V 4:163); see V:H 3:82 nn.

<sup>85</sup> *Virāga* also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).

<sup>86</sup> *Nirodha* (see §21).

<sup>87</sup> *Iti, bhavābhāva, kathā*, may be rendered as “being and non-being” or as “profit and loss,” but according to Walshe, the philosophical sense (as in Horner and Ñāṇamoli translations of Sandaka S, M 76) is preferable.

I shall not utter such talk.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

12.2 And, Ānanda, he resolves:

THE 10 BASES OF DISCOURSE<sup>88</sup>

Such talk, Ānanda, concerning **austerity** [effacement],  
conducing as a support for mind’s release,

and that leads to complete revulsion, to fading away (of lust), to ending (of suffering),  
to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say,<sup>89</sup>

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| (1) talk about wanting little,                       | <i>app’iccha,kathā</i>            |
| (2) talk about contentment,                          | <i>santuṭṭhi,kathā</i>            |
| (3) talk about solitude,                             | <i>paviveka,kathā</i>             |
| (4) talk about non-socializing,                      | <i>asaṃsagga,kathā</i>            |
| (5) talk about arousing effort,                      | <i>viriy’ārambha,kathā</i>        |
| (6) talk about moral virtue,                         | <i>sīla,kathā</i>                 |
| (7) talk about mental concentration,                 | <i>samādhi,kathā</i>              |
| (8) talk about wisdom,                               | <i>paññā,kathā</i>                |
| (9) talk about freedom,                              | <i>vimutti,kathā</i>              |
| (10) talk about the knowledge and vision of freedom— | <i>vimutti,ñāṇa.dassana,kathā</i> |

I shall utter such talk.’

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

## Right intention

**13** Ānanda, with that monk who abides thus, **[114]** if his mind is inclined to **thinking**, he resolves:  
‘Such thought that is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial, and  
that does not lead to revulsion, to fading away [of lust], to ending [of suffering], to nirvana,  
that is to say, thoughts of sense-desire, thoughts of ill will, thoughts of cruelty—

I shall not think such thoughts.

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

13.2 But, Ānanda, he resolves:

‘Such thoughts that are noble and leading onward (to nirvana),

<sup>88</sup> These *dasa kathā,vatthu* are listed in **Ratha,vinīta S** (M 24,2.3/1:145), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,12/3:113), **Ko-sala S 2** (S 10.30,9/5:67), **Vatthu Kathā S 1** (A 10.49/5:129). In **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), preceded by the stock, “Such talk concerning austerity [effacement], conducing as a support for mind’s release, and that leads to complete revulsion, to fading away [of lust], to ending [of suffering], to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say,...” (WT *Yā ca kho ayaṃ, ānanda, kathā abhisallekhikā ceto,vinīvaraṇa,sappāyā* [Ce Se Ke ceto,vicāraṇ,asappāyā; Ee ceto,vivarāṇa,sappāyā] *ekantanibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati, seyyathidaṃ*) (M 122,12/3:113), SD 11.4. Cf (**Sāriputta**) **Susīma S** (S 2.29/1:63). Some of these qualities are mentioned separately, eg **Jiṇṇa S** (S 16.5) says that this passage constitutes Mahā Kasa-sapa’s lion-roar regarding his forest-dwelling (S 16.5/2:202); so too in **Mahā Gosiṅga S** (M 32), he describes the ideal monk in the same terms; **Piṇḍola S** (U 4.6/42 f); **Vaṅganta,putta Upasena Tha** (Tha 581).

<sup>89</sup> These are the 10 topics of talk (*kathā,vatthu*) conducive to spiritual growth and awakening, viz: *app’icchā,-kathā, santuṭṭhi,kathā, paviveka,kathā, asaṃsagga,kathā, viriy’ārambha,kathā, sīla,kathā, samādhi,kathā, paññā,-kathā, vimutti,kathā, vimutti,ñāṇa,dassana,kathā* (M 1:145, 3:113; A 5:129). For refs: SD 46.11 (2.1) n.

that lead one who practises thus to the utter destruction of suffering,<sup>90</sup> that is to say, thoughts of **renunciation of sense-pleasures**, thoughts of **non-ill will**, thoughts of **non-violence**— I shall think such thoughts.’  
In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

## THE PATH TO NON-RETURNING

### The 5 cords of sensual pleasure

**14** Ānanda, there are these **5 cords of sensual pleasure**.<sup>91</sup> What are the five?<sup>92</sup>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) <b>Forms</b> cognizable by <u>the eye</u>     | that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.          |
| (2) <b>Sounds</b> cognizable by <u>the ear</u>    | <i>that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.</i>   |
| (3) <b>Smells</b> cognizable by <u>the nose</u>   | <i>that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.</i>   |
| (4) <b>Tastes</b> cognizable by <u>the tongue</u> | <i>that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.</i>   |
| (5) <b>Touches</b> cognizable by <u>the body</u>  | <i>that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the 5 cords of sensual pleasure.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> “That lead...to the utter destruction of suffering,” *niyyanti (niyyāti) tak, karassa sammā, dukkha-k, khayāya*, is stock (M 1:68, 81, 322, etc). Horner suggests that *takkarassa* (of one doing thus) “would be better rendered as ‘thinker’.” (M:H 3:157 n4).

<sup>91</sup> Comy: Up to this point, the Buddha has shown the training for the attainment of the first 2 paths, those of streamwinning and once-returning. He now speaks this passages [14-15] to point out the insight needed to attain to **the path of non-returning** (*anāgāmi, magga*) that culminates in the abandoning of sense-desire. (MA 4:163)

<sup>92</sup> §14 is stock = **Mahā Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 13,8/1:85 f) = **Cūḷa Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 14,7/1:92) = **Araṇa, vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9/3:234). The word *kāma* (sense-desire) is also tr as “sensual pleasure” and may refer to either the subjective defilement (*kilesa*) or the object of desire (*vatthu*) (Nm 1,1, Vbh 256, DhsA 62; cf A 3:410 f). “**5 cords of sensual pleasure**” (*pañca kāma, guṇa*), so called because they are the objects of the 5 physical senses (V 1:3, 17, 225, 293, 3:111; D 1:172, 2:243, 245, 3:60, 238; M 1:47, 85, 3:234; S 1:9, 132; A 3.411; Dh 48, 415; Sn 436; Tha 254; J 3:466, 4:172, 173, 469. 6:127; Ap 547; Nm 1; Vbh 256; Mvst 3.417.2; MA 1:199, 131, 2:261). They are also the qualities of desire, ie, that which brings pleasure to the senses, or desirable sense-experience, as listed in the passage here. They are “cords” (*guṇa*) because they bind one to them, and they “multiply” (*guṇa*) themselves as a result, binding one ever tighter to them. *Kāma* is also desire personified, ie the god of love, sometimes identified with Māra (Tha 3.88; BA 289). It is interesting to note here that there is no “mental pleasure” (*somanassa*) in the list. Such mental pleasures generally arise through mental focus or meditation, and as such are not regarded as *guṇa*, insofar as they provide a lasting sense of satisfaction and inner peace that lead to letting-go. See Intro (1.5).

<sup>93</sup> **Skilling** (1997:388 f) notes that the Tibetan version “has several statements not found in the Pāli:” In 11.2 (of the Tib version), the Buddha declares: “I do not say, Ānanda, that there is arousal in the mind apart from the 5 cords of sensual pleasure (*pañca kāma, guṇa*).” If a monk realizes that his mind is aroused by one or the other of the 5 cords of sensual pleasure (§11.3; cf Pali §15b), he should, with regard to the cords of sensual pleasure, dwell seeing impermanence, decay, dispassion, cessation, release (*anitya kṣaya virāga nirodha niḥśaraṇa*) (§11.4). When he does so (the whole list is repeated), his mind will no longer be aroused by any of the 5 cords of sensual pleasures (§11.5).

## Reviewing one's own mind

15 Here, a monk should constantly review his own mind, thus:

'Do any of these **5 cords of sensual pleasure** arise in my mind through a sense-base or not?'<sup>94</sup>

15.2 If, Ānanda, when reviewing, a monk understands thus,

'One or other of these 5 cords of sensual pleasure *do* arise in my mind through a sense-base,'

This being the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

'The lustful desire for these 5 cords of sensual pleasure has not been abandoned in me.'

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

15.3 If, Ānanda, when reviewing, a monk understands thus,

'None of these 5 cords of sensual pleasure arises in my mind through any sense-base,'

This being the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

'The lustful desire for these 5 cords of sensual pleasure **has been abandoned** in me.'

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

## THE PATH TO ARHATHOOD

### Right view: The 5 aggregates of clinging

16 <sup>95</sup>Ānanda, there are **these 5 aggregates of clinging**,<sup>96</sup> regarding which a monk should dwell contemplating *rise and fall* in them,<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Atthi nu kho me imesu pañcasu kāma,guṇesu aññatarasmim vā aññatarasmim vā āyatane uppajjati cetaso samudācāro ti?* lit 'Is there an occurrence of any of these 5 cords of sensual pleasure arising in my mind through a sense-base or not?' Here, the Buddha distinguishes between **two levels of sense-experience**: that of "the 5 cords of sensual pleasure" (*pañca,kāma,guṇa*) [16], that is, the level of the worldling, and "the 5 aggregates of clinging" (*pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*), that is, the level of the practitioner. The 5 cords of sensual pleasure have a "binding" or "grasping" effect on one who enjoys them. The 5 aggregates of clinging, on the other hand, are natural states that arise and fall away moment to moment. If a practitioner watches this rise and fall, he would abandon the "I am" conceit, and as such be free from the grip of Māra [17].

<sup>95</sup> "**The 5 aggregates of clinging**," *pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*, namely, form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) (S 3:47 Vbh 1). The aggregates of clinging (*upādāna-k,khandha*) are more fully called "the 5 groups of existence which form the objects of clinging" (Vism 14.214 f/477 f). **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) defines the aggregates of clinging as being "with influxes, subject to clinging" (*sāsava upādānīya*). According to the Abhidhamma, all forms (*rūpā*) are classified as "with influxes, subject to clinging," and so too the resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) mental aggregates of the arhat (Dhs 1103, 1219). The only aggregates that are "without influxes, not subject to clinging" (*anāsava anupādānīya*) are the 4 mental aggregates occurring in the cognitive moments of the 4 supramundane paths and fruits (Dhs 1104, 1220). The reason for this is that *sāsava* and *upādānīya* do not mean "accompanied by influxes and by clinging," but "capable of being taken as objects of the influxes and of clinging." Moreover, the arhat's mundane aggregates can be taken as objects of the influxes and of clinging by *others* (DhsA 347).<sup>95</sup> The Saṃyutta Comy says that while the form aggregate is of the sense-sphere, the other four aggregates are of the 4 spheres (sense sphere, form sphere, formless sphere, supramundane) (SA 2:270). See Intro (1.5).

<sup>96</sup> These two passages [§§16-17] point out the insight needed for the path of arhathood that culminates in the abandoning of the conceit "I am" (MA 4:163). These passages should be contrasted with those on "the 5 cords of sensual pleasures" [§§14-15]: see n at §15a.

<sup>97</sup> "In them," *yattha*.

'Such is <b>form</b> ;	such is its <i>arising</i> ;	such is its <i>falling away</i> .
Such is <b>feeling</b> ;	such is its <i>arising</i> ;	such is its <i>falling away</i> .
Such is <b>perception</b> ;	such is its <i>arising</i> ;	such is its <i>falling away</i> .
Such are <b>formations</b> ; [115]	such is their <i>arising</i> ;	such is their <i>falling away</i> .
Such is <b>consciousness</b> ;	such is its <i>arising</i> ;	such is its <i>falling away</i> .'

**17** When he dwells contemplating *rise and fall* in these 5 aggregates of clinging, the conceit 'I am' on account of the 5 aggregates of clinging is abandoned.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk understands thus:

'The conceit "I am" on account of *the 5 aggregates of clinging* has been abandoned.'

In this way, he clearly comprehends them.

**18** Ānanda, these states are concerned solely with the wholesome, that are wholesome (in fruition).<sup>98</sup> They are noble, supramundane, and unreachable by the bad one [Māra].

## TEACHER & PUPIL<sup>99</sup>

### Right speech: Looking up to the right teacher

**19** What do think, Ānanda? What good does a disciple see in the teacher so as to be worthy of his devotion [fit to be followed]

even if he [the disciple] is told to leave [is rejected]?"<sup>100</sup>

"Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it."<sup>101</sup>

**20** "Ānanda, a disciple should not regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion for the sake of **sutta** (teachings), **veyyākaraṇa** (Dharma expositions) or **geyya** (recitations).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> "Concerned ... with the wholesome," *ekanta,kusalā kusalāyatikā*. Comy glosses as *kusalato āgatā*, coming from the wholesome (MA 4:163). Horner, however, notes that "the sense of the exegesis and of the vll seems to be 'leading on (step by step) to what is skilled'" (M:H 3:158 n3).

<sup>99</sup> This section should be studied with **Lohicca S** (D 12/1:224-234) & **The Teacher or the Teaching?** (SD 3.14). See (1.5, 3).

<sup>100</sup> "Told to leave," *panujjamāno*, ie rejected, as at **Vana,pattha S** (M 17,26/1:108).

<sup>101</sup> *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā Bhagavaṃ nettikā Bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante Bhagavantaṃ yeva paṭbhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressanṭi ti*, at **Mahā Dhamma,samā-dāna S** (M 46,2/1:309 f), **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47,3/1:317), **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68,8/1:465), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,19/-3:115), SD 11.4; **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 2:24), SD 21.1, **Parivīmaṃsanā S** (S 12.51/2:81), SD 11.5, **Candūpama S** (S 16.3-/2:199), **Sammāsambuddha S** (S 22.58/3:66), **Sall'atthana S** (S 36.6/4:208), SD 5.5, **Ānanda S 2** (S 36.16/4:221); A 3.68/1:199, A 8.6/4:158, A 8.83/4:338, A 9.1/4:351, A 10.58/5:106, A 11.20/5:355.

<sup>102</sup> *Na kho Ānanda arahati sāvako satthāraṃ anubandhituṃ yad idaṃ suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇassa hetu*. It is unlikely that this passage is concerned with listing canonical texts but that it "simply speaks of following the teacher for the sake of ever more 'explanations' (instead of engaging in serious practice)," conjecturing that the original reading might have been *sutta,veyyākaraṇassa hetu* or *sutta,veyyākaraṇassa sotuṃ* (**Analyo** 2011a: 700). Though there are isolated occasions, such as at the close of **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,22/1:114), SD 6.14, where the discourse is called a *sutta*, the Buddha and the early saints usu refer to their teachings as *dhamma*. The notion of *sutta* as a finalized sermon or text is a post-Buddha development. It should also be noted that only *sutta* and *geyyā* are mentioned here, but the later canon speaks of "the 9 limbs of the Teacher's teaching" (*nav'aṅga satthu.sāsana*), com-

Why is the reason for this?

For a long time, Ānanda, you have learned the Dharma, remembered it, recited it, examined it, and well understood it as a view.<sup>103</sup>

20.2 But, Ānanda, there is this talk concerning **austerity**, conducting as a support for the mind's release, and that leads to complete revulsion, to fading away (of lust), to ending (of suffering), to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to **nirvana**; that is to say,<sup>104</sup> [§12.2]  
 talk about wanting little,                      talk about contentment,  
 talk about solitude,                              talk about non-socializing,  
 talk about arousing effort,                    talk about moral virtue,  
 talk about mental concentration,          talk about wisdom,  
 talk about freedom,                            talk about the knowledge and vision of freedom.

20.3 It is for the sake of such a talk that a disciple should regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion even if he is told to leave.

### Wrong livelihood: The 3 undoings

21 This being the case, <sup>105</sup> Ānanda, there is	the teacher's undoing; <sup>106</sup>	<i>ācāriyūpaddava</i>
this being the case, there is	the pupil's undoing;	<i>antevāsūpaddava</i>
this being the case, there is	the brahmachari's <sup>107</sup> undoing.	<i>brahmacārūpaddava</i>

prising of (1) **sutta** (discourses, Sn prose section, Niddesa, Vinaya, Vibhaṅga, and texts with "Sutta" in their titles); (2) **geyyā** (discourse containing stanzas); (3) **veyya, karaṇa** (prose-exposition, sometimes, in later works, referring to Abhidhamma); (4) **gāthā** (stanzas, such as Dhammapada, Thera, gāthā, Therī, gāthā, Sutta Nipāta stanzas); (5) **udāna** (inspired utterances, ie Udāna); (6) **iti, vuttaka** (Thus-said discourses, ie Iti, vuttaka); (7) **jātaka** (birth-stories, ie Jātaka); (8) **abbhūta, dhamma** (marvellous accounts); (9) **vedalla** (catechetical suttas, such as Cūḷa Vedalla S, Mahā Vedalla S, Sammā Ditṭhi S, Sakka, pañha S, Saṅkhāra, bhājanīya S, Mahā Puṇṇama S) (V 3:8; M 1:133; A 2:5, 3:86). The term *nav'āṅga satthu, sāsana*, however, is found only in Apadāna, Buddha, vaṃsa and Comys. Of these 9 divisions of the teaching, our sutta only mentions the first two. The word "exposition" (*veyyakaraṇa*) in the sutta has a general, non-technical sense. Having said that, I think *sutta* and *geyyā* here should be taken in their non-technical sense, as referring to the available non-Buddhist teachings of the day. Paraphrased: "We should not go to a teacher merely for the sake of explanations of sacred formulas and hymns." In the *spirit* of the Dharma, we can, of course, extend the Buddha's admonition to also mean that besides a theoretical study of the texts, we need to learn something more, viz, mental cultivation and spiritual freedom. See SD 58.1 (5.4.1.4); SD 49.8 (9.1.4.3); also **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 & **Language & discourse**, SD 26.11 (3.2.1).

<sup>103</sup> "Well understood as a view," *diṭṭhiyā suppaṭividdha*, lit "well penetrated by view." As at M32/1:213. The context here is prob that the monk has only "heard" (*suta, mayā paññā*) the teaching and thought (*cintā, mayā paññā*) about it, and has understood it thus far, but has no direct experience of it through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā, -maya paññā*) (D 3:219; Vbh 324).

<sup>104</sup> These are the 10 topics of talk (*kathā, vatthu*) conducive to spiritual growth and awakening, viz: *app'iccha, -kathā, santuṭṭhi, kathā, paviveka, kathā, asaṃsagga, kathā, viriy'ārambha, kathā, sīla, kathā, samādhi, kathā, paññā, -kathā, vimutti, kathā, vimutti, ñāṇa, dassana, kathā* (M 1:145, 3:113; A 5:129); see §12.2 above.

<sup>105</sup> "This being the case," *evaṃ sante*. For some disciples who live alone, it is difficult going (because of lack of understanding regarding the ten topics of talk). Therefore, to show the dangers (*ādīnava*) besetting solitude, he says *evaṃ sante*, which means "being in solitude thus," *evaṃ ekī, bhāve sante*. This passage is spoken to show the danger in solitude when one does not fulfill the proper purpose of solitary living (MA 4:164 f).

<sup>106</sup> "Undoing," *upaddavo*, may also be rendered as "disaster, calamity" (M:ÑB 1335 n1157).

<sup>107</sup> "Brahmachari," *brahma, cāri*, ie one who has taken up the rule of celibacy. The anglicized word is found in English dictionaries like Webster's 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary.



**22 (1) And what, Ānanda, is the teacher's undoing?**

22.2 Here, Ānanda, a certain teacher<sup>108</sup> resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, **[116]** a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.<sup>109</sup>

22.3 While he lives thus secluded, brahmin householders<sup>110</sup> from the market towns and country visit him, and

as a result of *brahmin householders from the market towns and country visiting him*, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires,<sup>111</sup> gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

22.4 This, Ānanda, is called **a teacher who is undone**.

Due to the teacher's undoing, he is one struck down by bad unwholesome states that defile, that bring rebirth, that invite trouble, that ripen in suffering, that lead to further [future] birth, decay and death.<sup>112</sup>

This, Ānanda, is the teacher's undoing.

**23 (2) And what, Ānanda, is the pupil's undoing?**

Ānanda, a pupil of a teacher, emulating<sup>113</sup> his teacher's solitude,

23.2 resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.

23.3 While he lives thus secluded, brahmin householders from the market towns and country visit him, and *as a result of brahmin householders from the market towns and country visiting him*, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires, gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

23.4 This, Ānanda, is called **a pupil who is undone**.

He is one struck down by bad unwholesome states that defile, that bring rebirth, that invite trouble, that ripen in suffering, that lead to future birth, decay and death.

This, Ānanda, is the pupil's undoing.

**24 (3) And what, Ānanda, is the brahmachari's undoing?**

24.2 Here, Ānanda, there arises in the world the Tathagata [Thus Come], an arhat, fully self-awakened, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, well-farer, knower of the worlds, unexcelled trainer of tameable persons, teacher of beings human and divine, awakened, blessed.

24.3 He resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.

24.4 While he lives thus secluded, brahmin householders from the market towns and country visit him. Yet, *as a result of brahmin householders from the market towns and country visiting him*,

<sup>108</sup> Comy: An outside teacher (*titthiyā*) (MA 4:165).

<sup>109</sup> The more common list is shorter, but prob later: "to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty abode": see **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118,17), SD 7.13 n. See also **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 3,9,12.2) n, SD 10.13.

<sup>110</sup> *Brāhmaṇa,gahapatikā*, also spelt as *brāhmaṇa,gahapati*, which is invariably a collective term, never an individual, ie, the landed community of of the brahmin villages (*brāhmaṇa,gāma*) or fiefs (*brahma,deya*) as a whole. This classification is based on land-ownership (ie their economic function), who nonetheless still identified with the larger priestly class. As such, individually, theu (such as Kūṭa,danta, Caṅkī, etc) are still referred to simply as *brāhmaṇa*. See Chakravarti 1987:72 f.

<sup>111</sup> "He becomes infatuated, harbours desires," *mucchati kāmayati* (PTS), but Se & Comy (MA 4:165) read *muccharaṃ nikāmayati*. MA 4:165: "He longs for and sets going the craving for infatuation" (*mucchana,taṇhaṃ pattheti pavatteti*), ie falling in love, one of the senses of *kāmeti* or *kāmayati* (M 2:40).

<sup>112</sup> The phrase "bad unwholesome states ... decay and death" occurs repeatedly in **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39.22-29/1:280).

<sup>113</sup> *anubrūhayamāno*.

he does not go astray, does not harbour desires, does not give in to greed,  
nor does [117] he revert to luxury.

24.5 But a disciple of the teacher [the Tathagata], emulating the teacher's solitude,<sup>114</sup> resorts to a secluded lodging:

the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove,  
the open air, a heap of straw.

24.6 While he lives thus secluded, brahmin householders from the market towns and country visit him,

and as a result of *brahmin householders from the market towns and country visiting him*,  
he becomes infatuated, harbours desires, gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

24.7 This, Ānanda, is called a **brahmachari who is undone**.

Due to the undoing of a brahmachari, he is one struck down by bad unwholesome states that defile,  
that bring rebirth, that invite trouble, that ripen in suffering,  
that lead to future birth, decay and death.

This, Ānanda, is the brahmachari's undoing.

24.8 But here, Ānanda, **the brahmachari's undoing** results in more suffering, bears more bitter fruit,  
than the teacher's undoing or the pupil's undoing, and it even leads one to the lower realms.<sup>115</sup>

### Right effort: Spiritual friendship with the teacher

**25** Therefore, Ānanda, conduct yourselves with friendliness [lovingkindness] towards me, not with hostility.<sup>116</sup> This will be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.

25.2 And how, Ānanda, do disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with hostility, without friendliness?

Here, Ānanda, the teacher teaches the Dharma out of compassion for the disciples, seeking their welfare, caring for them, saying:

'This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.'

His disciples *neither* desire to listen nor give an attentive ear *nor* establish their mind in wisdom [direct knowledge]. They err and turn away from the Teacher's teaching.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> "Emulating the teacher's solitude," *tassa satthu vivekaṃ anuyutto brūhayamāno*. Cf **Akaṅkheyya S** (M 6): "devote yourself to empty places" (*brūhetha suññ'āgārānaṃ*), is stated repeatedly (M 6/1:33-36).

<sup>115</sup> Comy: Going forth outside the Buddha's teaching brings small gain: one who falls away falls away only from mundane attainment. He meets no great suffering, just as one who falls from a donkey's back is only covered with dust. But the going forth in the Teaching brings great gain—the paths, the fruits and nirvana. One who falls away from this meets great suffering, like one falling from an elephant's back (MA 4:165). On an extreme level, (**Arahat-ta**) **Susīma S** (S 12.70) calls such a one "a thief of the Dharma" (one who ordains for selfish reasons and transgresses monastic rules), who would face suffering more painful than any earthly punishment, his conduct "results in more suffering, bears more bitter fruit, and it even leads one to the lower realms" (S 12.70,62/2:128), SD 16.8.

<sup>116</sup> This almost enigmatic statement should be understood in the light of §3-4a, where effectively the Buddha is telling Ānanda to break up the gathering. Understandably, Ānanda, as a mere streamwinner, could still misconstrue this gesture and become upset. Hence this statement.

<sup>117</sup> *Tassa sāvakaṃ sussūsanti sotarā odahanti <na> aññaṃ cittarā upaṭṭhapenti na vakkamma [na] ca satthu sāsānā vattanti*. The first *na* is better omitted and the second *na* should be inserted in PTS ed in accordance with Be Ce Se. **Sussūsanti** is 3<sup>rd</sup> pl of *sussūsati*, desiderative of *suṇāti* (he listens). However, I think it is also possible to render *sussūsati* as "he listens properly" (*su + suṇāti*), as evident from **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121,3/3:104), SD 11.3.3. The two words, however, are differently derived: *sussuta* (M 121,3) = *su + suta* (participle of *suṇāti*).

This, Ānanda, is how the disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with hostility, without friendliness.<sup>118</sup>

**26** And how, Ānanda, do disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility?

Here, Ānanda, the teacher teaches the Dharma out of compassion for the disciples, seeking their welfare, caring for them, saying:

‘This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.’

His disciples wish to listen, they give an attentive ear, they establish their mind in wisdom [direct knowledge]. They neither err nor turn away from the Teacher’s teaching.

This, Ānanda, is how the disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility.<sup>119</sup>

26.2 Therefore, **[118]** Ānanda, conduct yourselves with friendliness [lovingkindness]<sup>120</sup> towards me, not with hostility. This will be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.

**27** Ānanda, I shall not treat you as **a potter** treats raw damp clay.<sup>121</sup>  
Restraining you again and again,<sup>122</sup> I, Ānanda, will admonish you.

Cleansing you again and again,<sup>123</sup> I, Ānanda, will admonish you.

One who is the core will remain standing.”<sup>124</sup>

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**Lohicca S** (D 12) speaks of **3 kinds of blameworthy teachers**: (1) one gone forth but not realized the goal; his pupils do not listen to him; (2) one gone forth but not realized the goal; his pupils listen to him; (3) one gone forth and realized the goal; his pupils listen to him (D 12,6-8/1:230-232). Here (in Mahā Suññata S), the teacher who has realized the goal is meant, and as such is not blameworthy, but the erring pupils are blameworthy.

<sup>118</sup> For similar a reaction, see the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 3 satipatthanas at **Salāyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,24/3:211), SD 29.5.

<sup>119</sup> For similar reactions, see the first 2 of the 3 satipatthanas at **Salāyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,22-23), SD 29.5.

<sup>120</sup> “With friendliness,” *mittavatāya*.

<sup>121</sup> “As a potter treats raw, damp clay, *yathā kumbha,kāro āmake āmaka,matte*. Comy glosses *āmake* as *apak-khe*, and *āmaka,matte ti āmake nātisukkhe bhājane*, “an unbaked vessel, not quite dry. The potter gently takes these vessels in both hands, saying, ‘Do not break,’ but I will not proceed with you as the potter does.” (MA 4:166). I B Horner notes: “I do not see the full force of this simile ... But I believe it means that whereas the potter gives, and can give, his vessels one chance only, the Teacher is undefeated by any initial failure there may be, and proceeds undeterred with the expectation of final success on the part of his pupil” (M:H 3:162 n1).

<sup>122</sup> “Restraining you again and again,” *niggayha niggayha*. Comy: “Having exhorted once, I will not be silent. Constantly reproving (*niggahetvā niggahetvā*) again and again, I will exhort, I will instruct” (MA 4:166). Cf *niggayha,-vādī* (Dh 76), qu at DhA 2:108.

<sup>123</sup> “Cleansing you again and again,” *pavayha pavayha* (M 1:442, 444, 3:18 = DhA 2:108), ger of **pavāhati**, “(1) to cause to be carried away, to remove; freq with ref to water: to wash away cleanse (M 1:39; S 1:79, 183, 2:88; Tha 751). (2) to pull out, draw out (D 1:77, better read as *pabāhati*)” (PED abridged). Comy explains that the Buddha removes one’s faults (*dosa*), “as a potter, having removed (*pavāhetvā*, vi *pajahitvā*) the cracked and broken vessels [Se *bhinna,chinna,bhājanāni*] from among those that have been baked, takes the well baked ones, tapping (ie testing) them again and again. So too I having repeatedly removed (faults from you), will again and again exhort and instruct you.” (MA 4:166).

<sup>124</sup> *Yo sāro so ṭhassati*. Comy: “While being exhorted thus by me, those who have reached the pith (*sāra*) of the ways and the paths will persist. The mundane virtues [aforementioned teachings] are also intended as a criterion of spiritual essence.” (MA 4:167). *Sāra* means: (1) the heartwood or pith of a tree; (2) essence (essential truth). I B Horner: “It is no doubt meant that this will persist and endure (like well baked vessels) when all the mistakes and errors that dog as learner’s path have been cleared away and removed (like the cracked and broken vessels from among those that have been well baked)” (M:H 3:162 n4). In **Gandhāra J** (J 406), the potter imagery is again used

28 This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the venerable Ānanda rejoiced in the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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to show the Buddha's role as a teacher. Skilling 1997:393 n97 points to a recurrence of this same imagery in the **Saṅgha,bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1978a:78,19) is used in the same way.